A WALK IN BEXHILL OLD TOWN

De La Warr Pavilion

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For the Disabled, a lift and ramps are installed in the building and for the hard of hearing, an induction loop is in operation within the theatre.

A WALK IN BEXHILL OLD TOWN

BEXHILL MUSEUM

Published by
Old Town Preservation Society
based on research
carried out and collated by
F.E. RYE,
Vice-Chairman

The Bexhill Old Town
Preservation Society
wish to express their
appreciation to all who
assisted in the preparation
of this publication:

in particular

Shelan Arts for sketches and artwork

Bexhill Museum for photographs and
other material

F.E. Rye for extensive research and collation

A map of the walk in Bexhill Old Town
can be found on the centre pages.

S. PETERS-BEXHILL
C.A.GRAVES.

A Walk in Bexhill Old Town

The first recorded reference to Bexhill is the Charter dated 772 A.D. Granted by King Offa of Mercia it dedicated the existing Manor of Bixlea to the service and praise of God. There will have been many changes since then and this walk will attempt to highlight some of the historic buildings and interesting aspects of Bexhill Old Town.

We start our walk in Church Street by St. Peter's Church. There has been a place of worship here since 772 A.D. and further details are available in the guide for visitors obtainable at the Church. However, mention must be made of what is popularly known as the "Bexhill Stone", a beautifully carved 8th century stone probably the lid of a reliquary and evidence of Bexhill's Saxon origins. It is mounted in a case on the south of the tower.

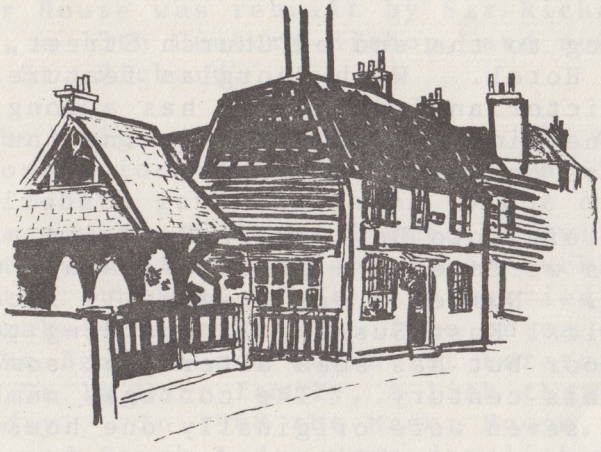
Opposite the Church Porch is a twitten or path that originally went through to the High Street. Here are four quaint old cottages, the first curiously named The Saltbox. The furthermost cottage is called Rimswell Cottage though old maps refer to it as Grimswell Cottage. It is timber

Rimswell Cottage

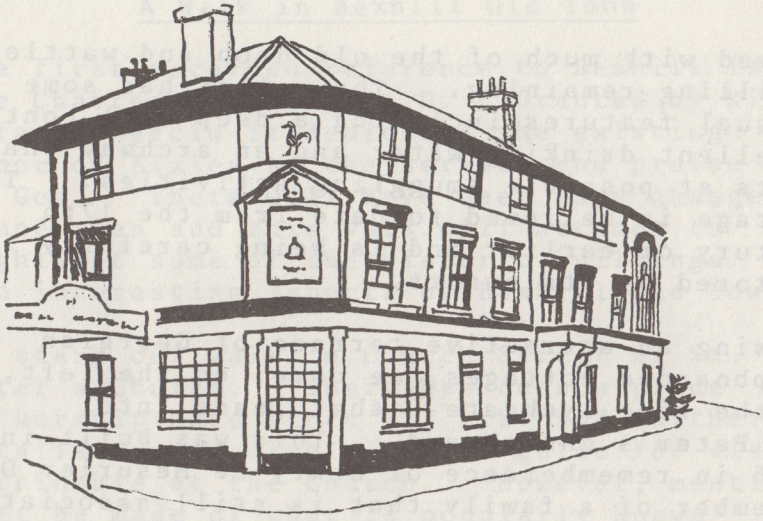
framed with much of the old daub and wattle infilling remaining. The cellar has some unusual features including a deep well containing excellent drinking water and an archway that hints at possible smuggling activities. This cottage is believed to date from the 17th century or earlier and is being carefully restored by its owners.

Passing an attractive terrace of Georgian clapboarded cottages, we come, on the left, to the fine lychgate that leads into St. Peter's churchyard. This was built in 1906 in rememberance of Henry Le Mesurier Dunn, a member of a family that is still associated with the Old Town after nearly 150 years.

Next to the lychgate stands a very well preserved 15th century Wealden House. This type of "Hall" house is found mainly in Kent and Sussex. A glance at the roof will show the extent of the



The Lychgate and Wealden House



Bell Hotel

original building which appears to have consisted of two "semis" each with unusual characteristics. Notice the attractive firemark on the front of the building.

Proceeding to the end of Church Street, note the Bell Hotel. With Georgian features and a late Victorian frontage it has a long history and at one time was an old coaching inn serving travellers on the coast road.

Turning left into De la Warr Road and proceeding eastwards we come to a group of mainly Georgian cottages. Number 1 was originally faced with typical East Sussex clapboarding to its upper floor but has been altered at some time during this century. The cottages numbered five and seven were originally one house with number three as stabling and servant accomodation. In Napoleonic times Thomas Pumphrey the Customs Officer lived here with his family.

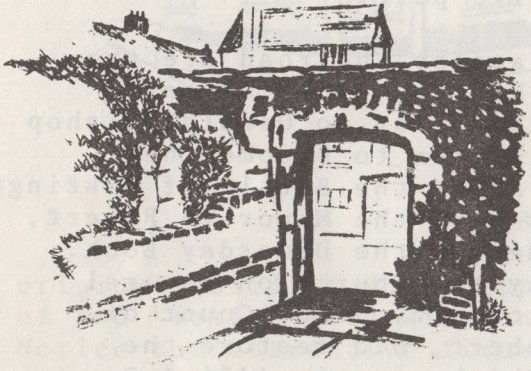
Passing two fine Victorian Villas we come to Hastings Road. This section is now a cul-de-sac but was originally part of the ancient coast road from Dover in Kent to Honiton in Devon. Notice on the left the remaining portions of an old hedgerow. On the right is Dorset Lodge formerly called Dorset Cottage. This Georgian house once belonged to Mr. Sidney Smith, surveyor to the Bexhill Local Board, which was appointed in 1884; meetings held here marked the beginning of our present local authority. Dorset Lodge and nearby East Lodge make an attractive pair.

Retracing our steps, across the road are the remains of the Manor House. The Charter of 772 A.D. granted the Manor to Oswald, Bishop of the See of Selsey, later to become the See of Chichester. After the Battle of Hastings, William the Conquerer gave the Manor to Robert, Count of Eu as recorded in the Domesday Book. This was challenged by the Church on several occasions and to his credit, John, Count of Eu and grandson of Robert, did restore the Manor to the See of Chichester in 1174 A.D. The Manor House was rebuilt by Sir Richard de Wycke, a 13th Century Bishop, and now known to us as St. Richard.

During the reign of Elizabeth Ist. the Crown gained possession of the Manor and in 1570 Queen Elizabeth gave the Manor to one of her favourite courtiers named Thomas Sackville, the first Earl of Dorset and Baron Buckhurst. In 1813 the 5th Earl De la Warr married Lady Elizabeth Sackville. This union eventually led to the Bexhill and Buckhurst estates passing into the De la Warr family, a link that remains to this day. In 1968 the Manor House, two cottages and South Lodge were demolished to enable to road to be widened.

Against the pavement is a 14th Century trefoil window. Unfortunately the stone mullions are crumbling away.

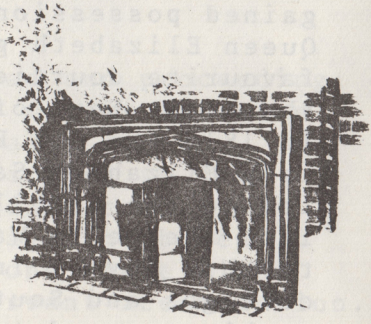
Nearer the crossroads there is an entry to a Tudor section of the Manor House where two fine doorways and a window stand side by side. To the left is an opening to the remains of the lounge with its fine Tudor style stone fireplace.



Tudor Doorway
Manor House ruins

c. 15th century window
Manor House ruins

c. 15th century doorway



Tudor style fire place
Manor House ruins

Looking down the Gardens towards the sea one can see the Manor Barn, the old Stables accommodating The Museum of Costume and Social History and the Coach House.

The Coach House, built about 1886, is a fine looking building with a large gable, gablets and barn hips. An unusual feature is the octagonal turret and cupola. The coachman's cottage was at the eastern end and living quarters for other estate servants were also provided on the first and second floors.

Below the Manor Barn there are vestiges of terracing possibly dating from the 15th Century when Henry VIth licensed Bishop Adam de Moleyne (1445 - 1450) to

> "empark 2000 acres at Bexhill and to enclose and embattle his Manor of the same name".

Returning to the road via the Tudor doorways, notice on the left the splendid wrought iron work commemorating the 1200th anniversary of the King Offa Charter.

Now comes the spacious junction of De la Warr Road, High Street and Upper Sea Road. There for all to see, high on the wall of the Antiques Centre, is the Jubilee Clock with its small belfry on the roof. It was erected in 1887 to celebrate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee.

South Lodge, a fine Georgian house now demolished, stood on the site of the bus stop and lay-by and faced westwards looking down High Street.

Old Walnut Tree, c. 1900

Within a few feet of the bollards at the start of De la Warr Road a huge walnut tree stood for about 400 years until 1921. Somewhere between the tree and South Lodge were the village stocks which disappeared in the 19th Century.

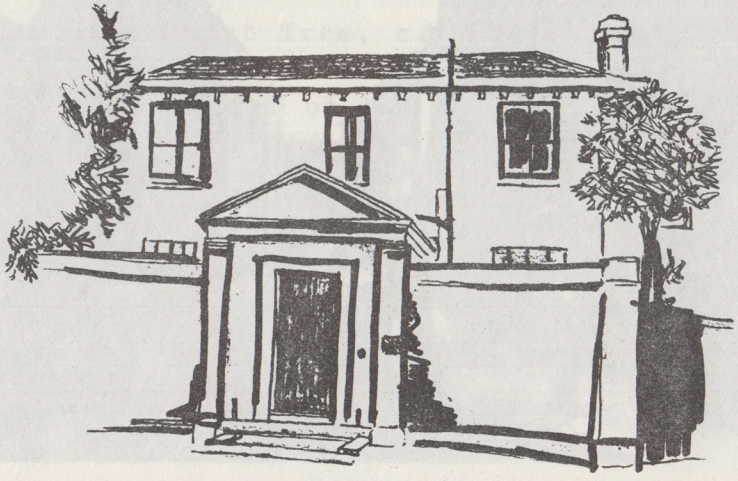
Near the top of Upper Sea Road stands The Grange formerly called Brook House, after the Brook family.
"Squire" A.S. Brook was the Earl's bailiff and kept the "Bexhill Harriers", a pack of Southern Hounds - a breed that is now extinct.

Nearer the junction, overlooking the site of East Down House, Bexhill's first convalescent home, stands Forge House. The Forge, demolished soon after World War 2, stood in the drive against the boundary with The Grange. Forge House was originally several very old cottages with the blacksmith living at one end while the baker lived at the other end, above his shop.

The Forge, c. 1910

Turning back into the High Street, Hanover House is seen on the left. It was built in 1806 possibly for an Officer of the King's German Legion stationed at Bexhill during the Napoleonic Wars. Notice its fine Georgian doorway.

Further along on the same side is Linkwell built about 1828 by Richard Day and still in the possession of his descendants. This fine late Regency house has a splendid south facing elevation. Note how the western wing is lower than the rest of the house. This part is much older and together with the yard and outbuildings was evidently part of a mill complex in the middle of the 17th Century when the area was called Rosiers. The orchard and garden are much higher than the roadway and are enclosed by a fine Sussex cobble flint wall that sweeps around into Belle Hill where the entrance to the drive was once situated.



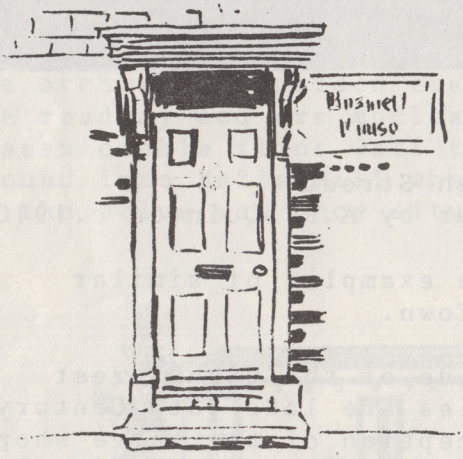
Linkwell

High Street
from a watercolour by A.R. Quinton c.1910

There are other fine examples of similar walling in the Old Town.

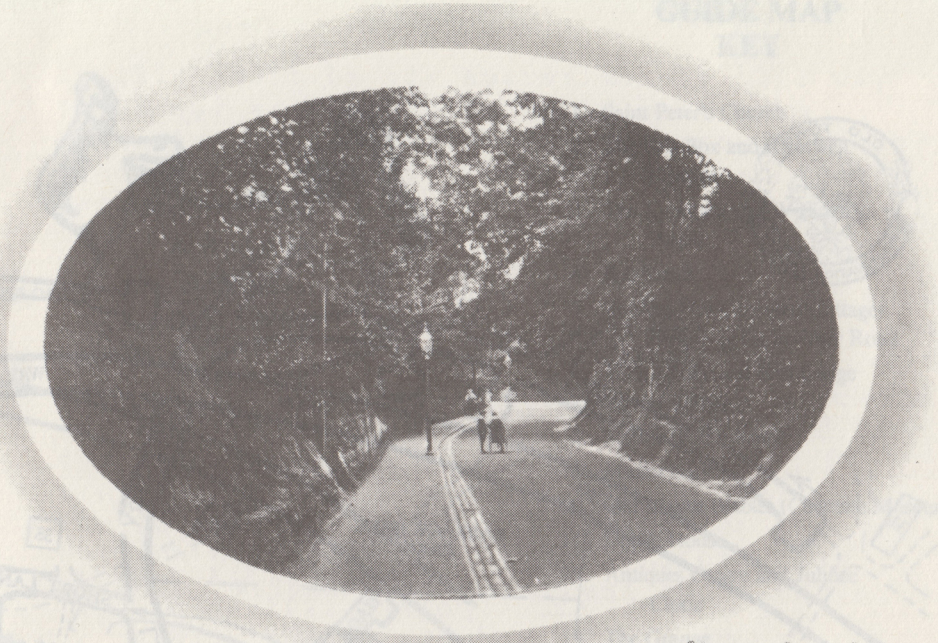
On the right-hand side of the High Street most of the properties are late 18th Century, with the obvious exception of the three shops, Nos. 16, 18 and 20, built at the turn of the 19th Century and No. 12, a Victorian house. Although some of these 18th Century properties have been altered in appearance over the years, they are full of character and substantial parts of them may well date back to the 16th Century. Certainly the stone mullioned window high up on the side of Trafalgar House, uncovered in recent years, is very old.

There are many interesting features to be noted along this side of the High Street. Compare the various types of Georgian doorways and do not miss the 18th Century Fire Mark on Osborne House, where Mr. Bunting, the village schoolmaster lived for fifty years. Notice also how the traffic fumes have blackened the lower courses of flints on Boswell House, a reminder of the incredible density of traffic before the King Offa by-pass was built.



Doorway of Boswell House

At the far end of the High Street is No. 24 which as J.L. Pococks, the butchers, began trading in 1801 and counted the Bexhill barracks as a customer. The shop continues to flourish but the stockyard and slaughterhouse at the rear have served different purposes since 1939.

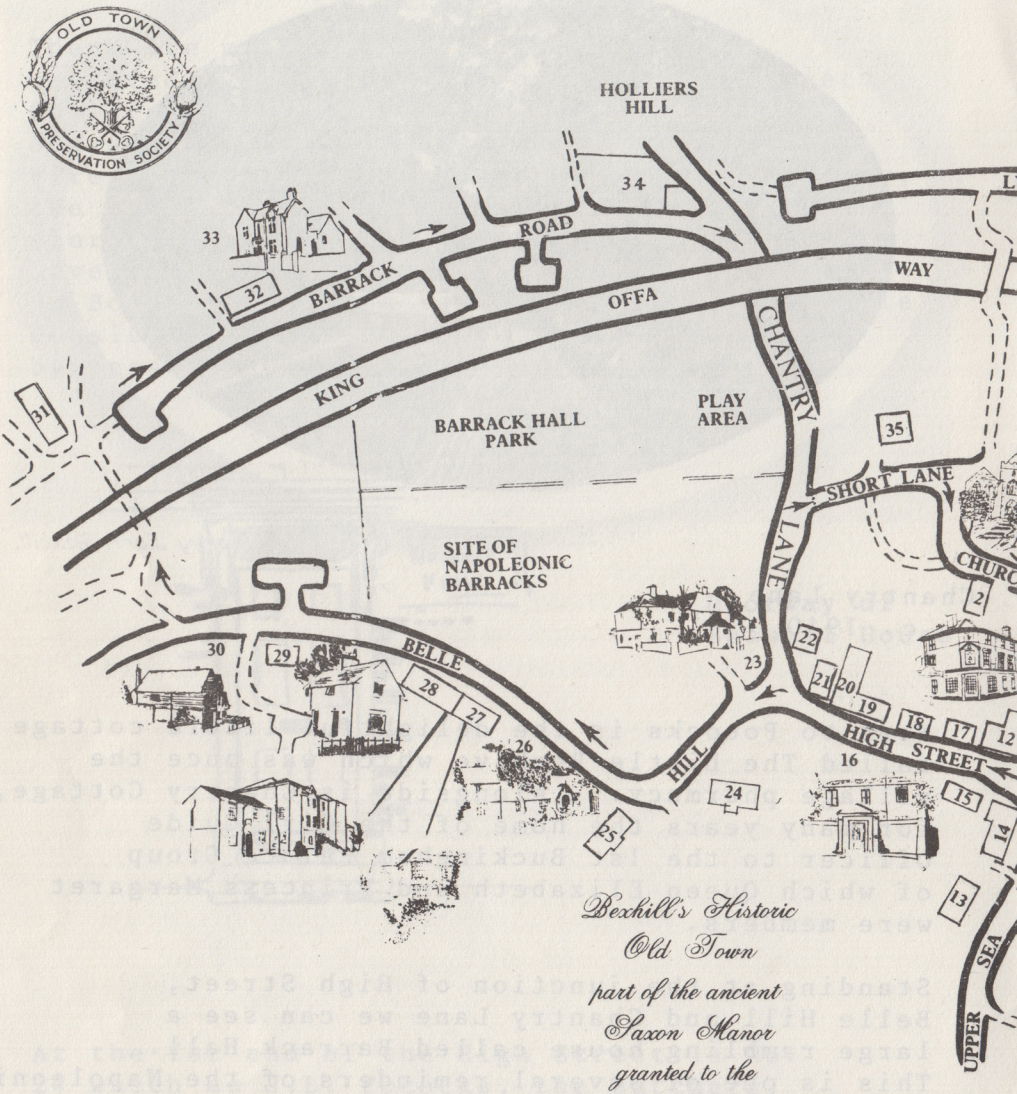


Chantry Lane, Bexhill.

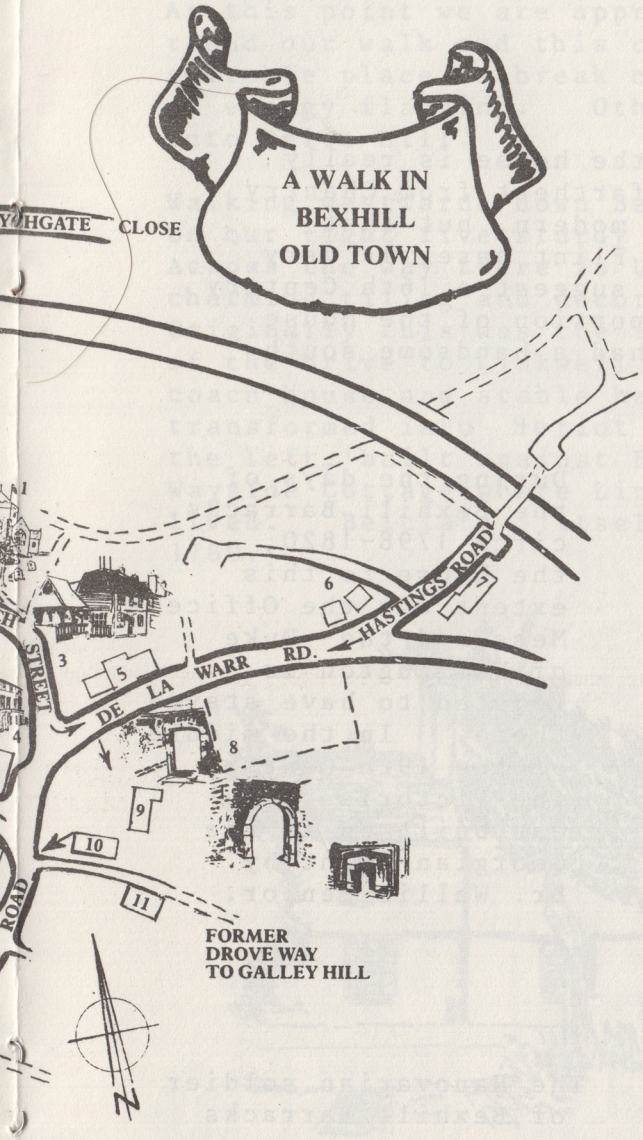
Chantry Lane
c. 1910

Next to Pococks is the delightful little cottage called The Little Beehive which was once the village pharmacy. Alongside is Chantry Cottage, for many years the home of the Girl Guide Officer to the 1st Buckingham Palace Group of which Queen Elizabeth and Princess Margaret were members.

Standing at the junction of High Street, Belle Hill and Chantry Lane we can see a large rambling house called Barrack Hall. This is one of several reminders of the Napoleonic Wars in the Old Town. It formed part of the Bexhill Barracks which occupied 25 acres dominating Bexhill at that time. It served mainly as barracks for the King's German Legion Infantry and a mustering point for the Hanovarian soldiers before going off to fight on the Continent.



Bexhill's Historic
Old Town
part of the ancient
Saxon Manor
granted to the
See of Selsey by
Offa, King of the Mercians
15th August, 772 A.D.



GUIDE MAP KEY

1. Saint Peter's Church
2. The Salt Box and Rimswell Cottage
3. The Lychgate and Wealden House
4. Bell Hotel
5. Row of four Georgian Cottages Nos 1 - 7 De la Warr Road
6. West Lodge and East Lodge
7. Dorset Lodge
8. Manor House Ruins
9. Manor Barn
10. Old Manor Stables (Costume Museum)
11. Coach House
12. Antiques Centre and Jubilee Clock
13. The Grange
14. Forge House
15. Hanover House
16. Linkwell
17. Trafalgar House
18. Osborne House
19. Boswell House
20. J.L. Pocock's (Butcher's Shop)
21. The Little Bee Hive
22. Chantry Cottage
23. Barrack Hall
24. Upmeads
25. Heriot Lodge
26. Wayside Cottage and Belclare
27. Goddard House
28. Millfield
29. Sorrel Cottage
30. The Granary
31. Belle Hill Methodist Chapel
32. Chantry Infants' School
33. Old Police Station
34. Barrack Road Cemetery
35. Rectory

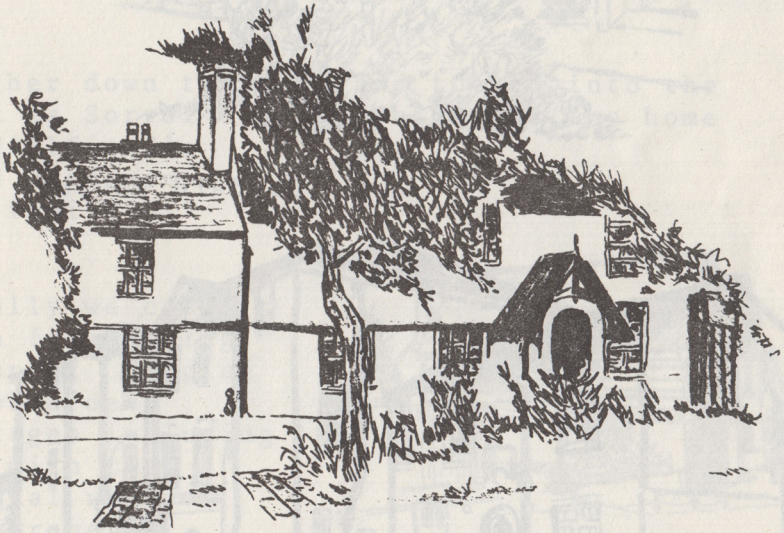
The northern wing of the house is really in two parts. That farthest from Chantry Lane is comparatively modern, but that nearest with a Sussex Flint base, is very old. Interior walls suggest a 16th Century dating. The centre portion of the house is Georgian and once had a handsome south facing elevation.

During the days of the Bexhill Barracks, circa 1798-1820, the house to this extent was the Officers Mess and the Duke of Wellington is reputed to have stayed there. In the middle of the 19th Century the Victorian wing was built on to the Georgian front by Dr. Wallis senior.

The Hanovarian soldier of Bexhill Barracks

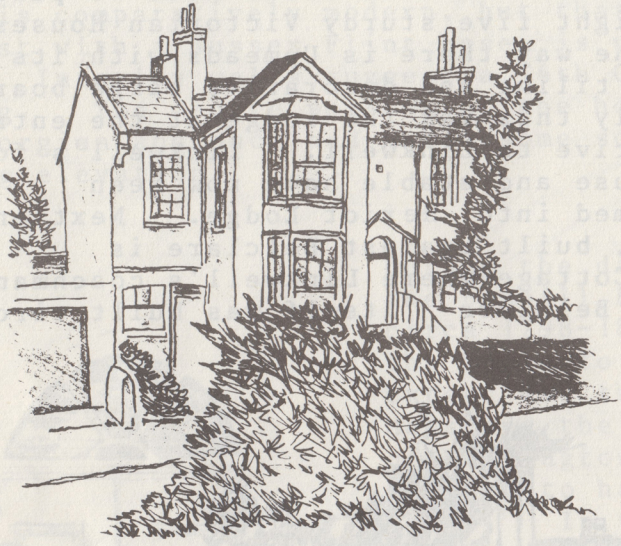
At this point we are approximately half way round our walk and this could well be a suitable place to break off if time is pressing or energy flagging. Otherwise we continue into Belle Hill.

Walking westwards down Belle Hill we pass on our right five sturdy Victorian Houses. Across the way there is Upmeads with its charming tiling and decorative barge boards. Originally this was the lodge at the entrance of the drive to Linkwell. Linkwell's former coach house and stable have now been transformed into Heriot Lodge. Next on the left, built against Belclare is Wayside Cottage where Linkwell's coachman lived. Belclare itself was built circa 1780.



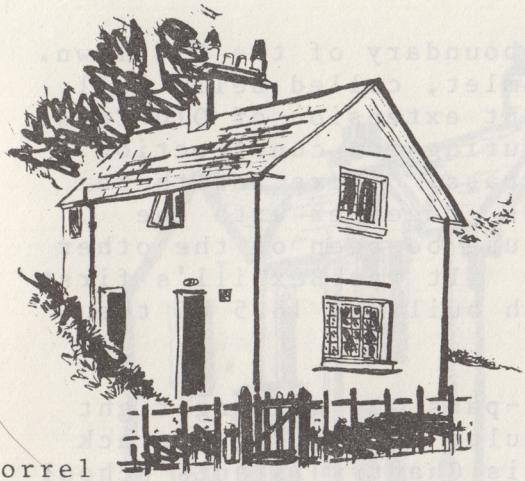
Wayside Cottage and Belclare

Goddard House formerly called Genista, is next. It is believed that it was built in 1806 and was the home of a senior officer stationed at the Bexhill Barracks. The unusual addition on the eastern end is believed to be Bexhill's first Post Office.



Goddard House

Millfield

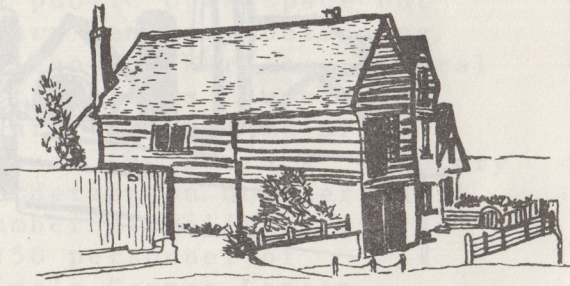


Sorrel Cottage

Now comes Millfield, formerly called The Firs. It is probably late Regency and was the home of Samuel Scrivens and his family for more than fifty years. In his day Mr. Scrivens owned a large amount of land and property in Bexhill - and as a landowner was second only to the Earl De la Warr.

Further down the hill and tucked into the bank is Sorrel Cottage which was the home of Millfield's Head Gardener and his family.

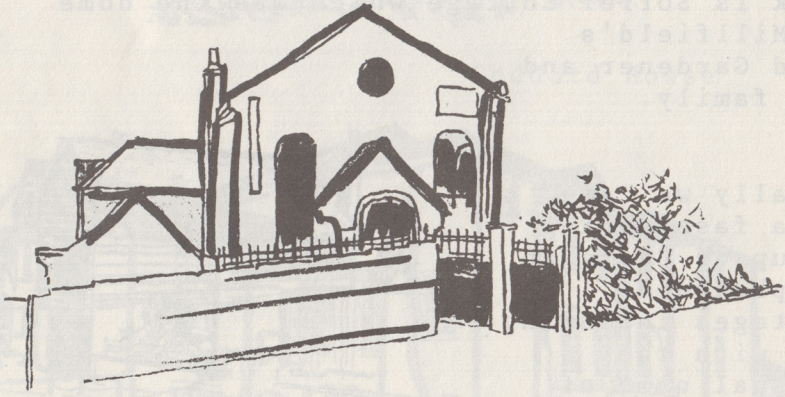
Finally we come to a fascinating group of Georgian clapboarded cottages including one with the unusual name of The Granary.



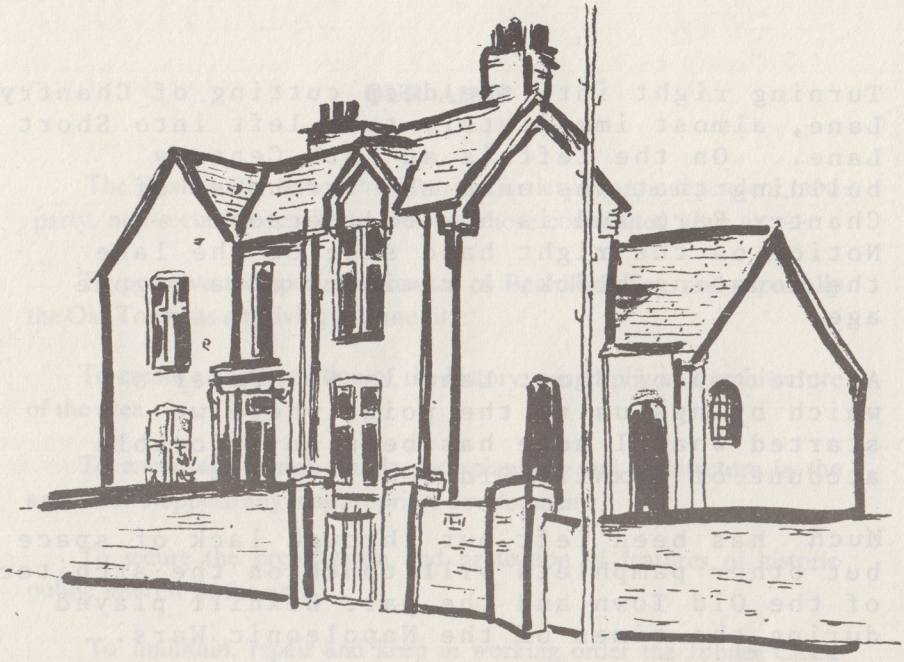
The Granary

This is the western boundary of the Old Town. Until the 1970s a hamlet, called Belle Hill, survived as an ancient extension of Old Town but was demolished during the construction of the King Offa by-pass. Here and there an old house survives together with the Chapel which can just be seen on the other side of the by-pass. It was Bexhill's first Non-Conformist Church built in 1825 by the Methodists.

Passing under the by-pass and turning right we continue our circular walk along Barrack Road. On the left is Chantry Infants School formerly Old Town's St. Peter's Girls School and Infants School. Next to it is Bexhill's first Police Station - notice the lock-up on the side.



Belle Hill Methodist Chapel



Bexhill's first Police Station

At the end of the road is the old Barrack Road Cemetery, now a public open space but originally the military cemetery belonging to the Barracks. Although there are several military graves in St. Peter's Churchyard, all the indications are that the majority of burials took place in the Barrack Cemetery and in the recess bordering on Holliers Hill there are a large number of military graves including at least 150 personnel of King George III's King's German Legion.

Turning right into the deep cutting of Chantry Lane, almost immediately turn left into Short Lane. On the left is an 18th Century building that was once the farmhouse of Chantry Farm and is now the Rectory. Notice on the right hand side of the lane the mounting block, a reminder of a bygone age.

At the top of Short Lane is St. Peter's which brings us to the point where we started what I hope has been an enjoyable account of Bexhill Old Town.

Much has been left out through lack of space but other pamphlets will touch on the architecture of the Old Town and the part Bexhill played during the times of the Napoleonic Wars.

There is still much to discover about Bexhill Old Town's past. For those interested, further information may be obtained by contacting the Library or the Museum in Egerton Road.

OUR AIMS

The Bexhill Old Town Preservation Society is an independent, non-party, non-sectarian registered charity whose constituted aims are:—

To preserve the special character of Bexhill-on-Sea, and especially the Old Town, as a thriving community.

To create an appreciation of the history, geography and architecture of the area.

To encourage a high standard of planning and architecture in the area and to oppose any inappropriate developments.

To secure the preservation and protection of features of historic public interest in the area.

To maintain, repair and keep in working order the Jubilee Clock and its belfry, as agents of the Trustees responsible for this public monument.

Membership of the Society is open to all who are interested. After completion of the Membership Application Form, please detach it and forward it with your subscription to:—

The Membership Secretary,
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The Annual Subscription is £2 per person payable on April 1st.

To the Membership Secretary

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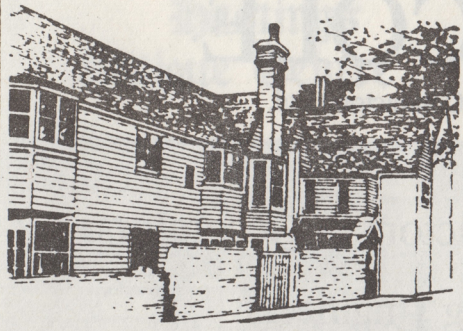

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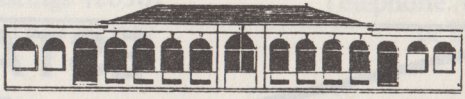

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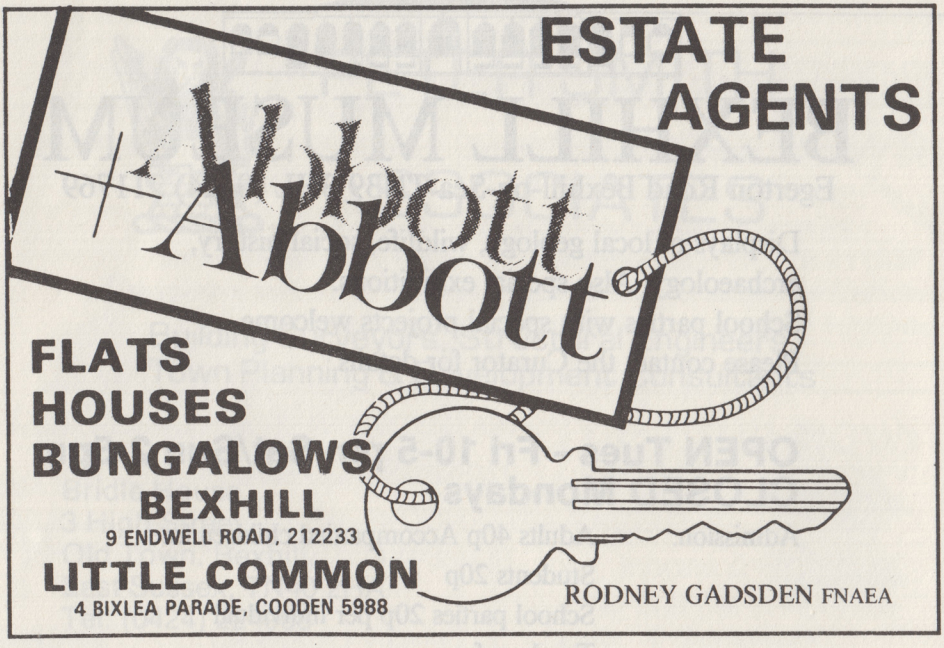

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